

Music is the vehicle he has used to teach kids

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For The Patriot Ledger

DUXBURY — Roger Jarvis gets a contented gleam in his eyes as he leans back in his chair and talks about his new career: sport fisherman, chasing across Massachusetts Bay after the giant bluefin tuna.

It's the same look he gets, say his students, when he conducts Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," or talks to them about his favorite jazz music.

"His eyes seem to light up," high school choir president Nancy O'Toole says about watching him conduct. "You can tell he loves it."

This December, after 27 years as the head of the public school music department, Jarvis is retiring. Or, to use his own words, he's changing careers.

Duxbury

He plans to devote himself full-time to the pursuits that have filled his summers: making custom fishing rods, running a tackle shop and charter boat at Green Harbor Marina, and matching wits with the bluefin tuna.

"It's an awfully big challenge. There are so many different ways they can get away, and every one of them is different," he said of his fascination with the giant fish. Averaging 750 to 850 pounds, he said, they are sold primarily in Japan for consumption in raw dishes like sushi.

Jarvis' prize catch was 1,000 pounds — on the nose. Instead of using rod and reel, he likes to use a handline — just a hook, leader and 300 feet of line, pulled in hand over hand.

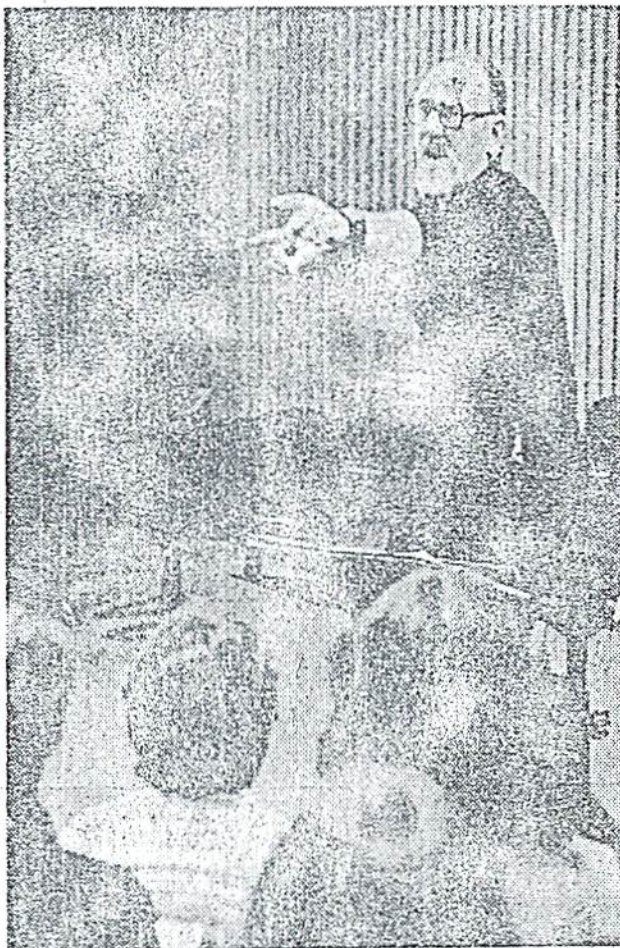
"I like the handline because the only thing between you and the fish is the line," he says. "But no matter how you get a tuna, it's the most exciting thing I've done."

Perhaps Jarvis has brought some of the patience of the fisherman to the halls of Duxbury High.

"He's sort of quiet and easy-going, yet quite deliberate in what he does," said assistant principal John Pierce, who has worked with him for 10 years. "The kids enjoy themselves. . . . In all the years I've been here, I haven't met anyone who doesn't like him."

When Jarvis came on board 27 years ago, he taught all the music courses, kindergarten through grade 12, plus an eighth grade math class. The band was made up of 10 horn players and five drummers.

Under his direction, the music department has grown to



include a choir, orchestra, bands at both the junior and senior high levels, as well as a jazz orchestra and a jazz band.

Jarvis, 56, says he now gets the most enjoyment from directing the high school musicals and the choral groups. But he launched his musical career playing the saxophone, alto sax and clarinet.

He performed with a dance band for a while after moving to Duxbury. But, he explains, "by the time I finished college, my type of playing was just about done. All the big bands had disappeared, except for Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

"It changed to rock and roll, and small groups and guitars and amplification — you had to do that if you wanted to work," he continued. "I like it, but it didn't appeal to me to perform it."



Getting into his music, Roger Jarvis, head of Duxbury's music department, sings along as he directs the high school choir. At left, Jarvis seems to have found the culprit playing flat during practice. (Staff photos by Fred Keenan)

Now, Jarvis sees himself as a teacher. "I don't ever think that I'm teaching music. I'm teaching kids," he explains. "Music is the vehicle. We're using the instruments, or voice, to help kids understand themselves better, what their strengths and weaknesses are."

Some of his students do pursue careers in music or music education. One of his percussion pupils, Stanley Ellis, returned to Duxbury High as a music teacher after spending 10 years on the road as a professional drummer.

Each year, his former students and choir members come back to the school's Christmas program to join in and sing "The Hallelujah Chorus."

But Jarvis claims his goal has not been to fashion musicians, but people — "people who have their heads together and can do something for themselves and for society as a whole."